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TAGS: PREL MARR PTER MASS TU IZ IR

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETINGS WITH THE TURKISH GENERAL

STAFF: IRAQ, PKK, IRAN AND DEFENSE PROCUREMENT

REF: A. USDAO ANKARA 211

1B. ANKARA 273

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (S) Summary: During separate meetings with Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief GEN Hilmi Ozkok, TGS Deputy Chief GEN Isik Kosaner, and Turkish Land Forces (TLFC) Commander GEN Yasar Buyukanit January 26 and 27, the Ambassador asserted that Turkey should do nothing to disrupt the fragile situation in Iraq. Buyukanit said his poor English resulted in his comments in Washington to CJCS Gen Pace about a "spring offensive" in Iraq being "misunderstood" (ref A); TLFC has no such plans. The generals expressed understanding as to why the US cannot undertake operations against the PKK in northern Iraq, but pleaded for the arrest and rendition of one or more PKK leaders from northern Iraq to demonstrate to the Turkish public that the USG stands with Turkey against terrorism. The generals also repeated the GOT policy of opposing Iran's acquiring a nuclear weapon while calling for a diplomatic solution to the issue. The Ambassador noted US companies' problems in competing for defense contracts under Turkey's new procurement system. The TGS leaders pushed back, noting that some of the responsibility lies with US law and companies, but accepted that US participation in tenders was good for Turkey. End Summary.

Iraq: Fragile Time/No Cross-Border Operations

¶12. (S) After opening exchanges at TGS reaffirming the importance of strengthening the US-Turkey military relationship, the Ambassador noted that Iraq is currently the most important issue for the USG. He expressed appreciation for Turkish cooperation on Iraq, which is recognized by the highest levels of the USG. Iraq was currently at a sensitive stage, and Turkey and the US need to stay in close contact, he said. Nothing should happen through or from Turkey to break the fragile situation there, he warned.

3, (C) Ozkok responded that Turkey wants all factions to participate in the next Iraqi government. It was especially important that the Kurds be included to keep the north from splitting away. Ankara was prepared to help with all the factions. He urged the US to listen to Turkey's advice, noting that while the US may have better intelligence, Turkey enjoyed a longer experience with the region that developed certain instincts. He called for a deeper bilateral dialogue on Iraq. He also said the Turkmen, one of two Iraqi peoples akin to Turkish citizens (the other are Kurds), needed protection by the US and Turkey because they were vulnerable on their own. Kosaner worried that the lack of a single Iraqi military chain of command, with units following orders from anyone other than the CHOD, would pose a serious challenge to stabilizing the country. Neither general made reference to a possible cross-border operation this year.

¶14. (S) The meeting with Buyukanit was the day after the TGS meetings. Buyukanit began by reviewing his recent counterpart visit to the US, which he characterized as "more than excellent." He said he had heard that some were claiming that he talked in Washington about a spring offensive attack on PKK bases across the border in northern Iraq, which was not true. TLFC has anti-PKK operations in SE Turkey year-round, so he never talks about seasonal offensives. Buyukanit said he told CJCS Gen Pace about the problem posed by the 3,000 PKK fighters in Iraq moving into camps close to the Turkish border. If more meaning was read into what he said than that, it was due to his broken English, he said. The Ambassador expressed appreciation for Buyukanit's clarification and said he would relay it to Washington. He had discussed the issue with Gen Pace and had wanted Buyukanit's views. Ambassador said he shared the deep frustration at the continued presence of the PKK in northern Iraq, but was also concerned that no one do anything that might destabilize the sensitive situations there.

¶15. (S) Comment: The Ambassador had raised in a private conversation several days earlier with MFA U/S Tuygan

Buyukanit's comment to Gen Pace that he would like to conduct a cross-border operation in the spring. At that time, Tuygan said he would talk to Buyukanit. This and the Ambassador's conversations the previous day with Ozkok and Kosaner apparently prompted Buyukanit to preempt discussion of cross-border operation by declaring it a non-issue. End comment.

PKK: Psychological Pressure Needed

16. (C) The Ambassador underscored with each general the broad bilateral cooperation underway against the PKK -- sharing intelligence, working to cut PKK financial streams, improving Turkish extradition requests to European countries, and building Iraqi authorities' ability to deal with terrorists in Iraq. The PKK is a multifaceted problem requiring a multifaceted solution.

17. (C) All three generals signaled appreciation for US efforts, but also thought visible action by the US against the PKK would improve the Turkish public's perception of the United States. Ozkok agreed that without external support the PKK would wither away. They allowed that it was not practical to expect the US to capture or kill all the PKK; Kosaner and Buyukanit thought that handing over a few PKK leaders would be a good gesture for Turkish public opinion. The generals all well understood the difficulties of fighting the PKK in northern Iraq, and acknowledged the difficulty in controlling the border without any help on the Iraqi side.

18. (C) According to Ozkok, more than military, political or economic pressure, psychological pressure was needed to defeat the PKK. What he wanted from the US, therefore, were strong statements by senior officials condemning the organization as well as pressure on the Iraqi Kurds to deny the PKK freedom of movement and logistic support in the KRG area. Kosaner in particular dwelt on this latter point (the PKK's freedom of movement in Iraq). He appreciated the Ambassador's public comments that the PKK in Iraq was not only a problem for Turkey, but for the USG and GOI as well. Buyukanit revealed frustration with European attitudes toward the PKK, pointing particularly at the Danes and Roj TV. The Ambassador noted that one objective of our collaboration with Turkey on the PKK in Europe was to change European attitudes.

Iran: Diplomatic Solution Desired

19. (C) Given that EUCOM DCDR Gen Wald addressed Iran at length during his January 17 visit to TGS (ref B), the Ambassador wanted to reinforce the point that the US sought a diplomatic solution to the issue and to seek Turkish views on this high priority issue. He emphasized that the international community needed to speak with one voice in support of Iran's meeting its obligations to the IAEA and the EU-3. The generals affirmed that Iran's nuclear weapons program was a threat to Turkey. Ozkok, echoing Gen Wald's points, noted that while Turkish-Iranian relations were good now, Iran's intentions could change suddenly; thus, Iran must be kept from acquiring nuclear weapons. At the same time, he worried that isolating Iraq might increase its incentive to acquire WMD. Both he and Buyukanit expressed concern about Iranian influence in the Caucasus as well.

Defense Procurement Problems

10. (SBU) The Ambassador noted American defense contractors' difficulties over the past two years with Turkey's new procurement system (i.e., non-negotiable terms and conditions that must be accepted unconditionally when submitting bids). Once the bedrock of our bilateral relationship, defense industry cooperation had now become a problem. The three generals declared the Turkish military's preference for American equipment. They also noted how the military sets the requirements, but other agencies -- Defense Industries Undersecretariat (SSM) and the Ministry of National Defense (MND) -- actually procure defense articles.

11. (SBU) Ozkok noted how Turkish industry had developed in recent years and needed to participate more in defense procurement projects. Also, changes in the security environment had changed the military's requirements. He thought American companies did not well understand how Turkey was changing and they should try harder, he advised. He asserted that the USG had the responsibility to address US legal and regulatory prohibitions that might inhibit American companies' competitiveness; he did not see the need for Turkey to change in order to make opportunities just for US companies. Kosaner, who previously served as undersecretary of MND, said Minister Gonul and he were aware of the problems in general terms, but did not know what specifically was

keeping American companies from bidding on Turkey's defense tenders. (Note: We understand the American Turkish Council is working on a letter to Gonul laying out the specifics. End note.) Nonetheless, SSM's mission was to develop Turkish industry and maximize local content.

¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador responded that American companies generally understand Turkey's desire for technology and to build its defense industry. He was not arguing for a US monopoly of the Turkish defense market. Instead, he proposed to work with all stakeholders in the GOT to find a way so that American contractors can compete and so that Turkey can benefit from competitive US bids. He feared that SSM's current terms and conditions may be thwarting, rather than accomplishing, Turkish policy goals.

Other Issues: Buyukanit's woes;
Syria; Border Surveillance FMS Case Coming

¶13. (C) Other comments of interest during these meetings included:

-- Media Pressure on Buyukanit: Buyukanit, who is Ozkok's assumptive heir to the CHOD position, complained about how the Turkish press spun his visit into more than what it was (one story had him receiving instructions from Washington) and criticized him for speaking at AEI, an institution that the Prime Minister and others had addressed in the past.

-- Syria: Stating that Damascus' support for terrorism was "indisputable," Ozkok cautioned against trying to replace Asad, saying he was better than anyone who might succeed him. Turkey has cultural and social ties with Syria and could work on changing Damascus's policies, he said.

-- Border Surveillance Systems: Buyukanit said TLFC had sent a request to TGS for balloon-mounted cameras for border monitoring to help stop illegal trafficking and smuggling along Turkey's border with primarily Iran but also Iraq. If TGS approves, TLFC would initially request 2 or 3 units via FMS to test.
WILSON